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CIA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

If a CIA Historical Museum is to be established, prompt action is required to collect significant material before it is discarded. As each day passes, it becomes clearer that positive steps must be taken if such intelligence hardware and related items of historical interest are to be preserved.

As an example consider audio surveillance equipment. When integrated circuits in the last few years replaced transistorized equipment which in the late fifties had rendered vacuum tube devices obsolete, it was only natural that as this evolution took place earlier equipment was cannibalized or disposed of. While some of the original audio gear can perhaps still be located, as each month goes by it becomes more and more difficult to assemble an historical collection of eavesdropping equipment used or designed by CIA during the past 25 years. If another 10 years is allowed to pass the earliest equipment will certainly have vanished.

Only the establishment of a CIA Historical Museum can lead to the orderly identification of significant historical items and their proper preservation. The problem permeates all directorates of the Agency since candidate material would come from TSD, Commo, NPIC, and perhaps offices which would not immediately come to mind, such as Medics, Logistics, and even General Counsel.

Security considerations impose constraints which do not apply to conventional museums. Some unclassified CIA material could surely be brought together for immediate display in the main lobby of the Headquarters building where it would be visible to uncleared visitors. By far the bulk of the items, however, is classified and these presumably would not be candidates for exhibition for several or even a great many years. In some instances it would be difficult to imagine that certain items could ever be displayed to uncleared personnel, but this fact should not prevent the material from being identified and preserved for classified exhibitions.

These peculiar security considerations surrounding espionage material require a correspondingly unusual organizational set-up for the Museum. While it would be better to assemble material in a central location, the sensitive nature of some items might be such that the directorate wherein they originate may wish to retain custody of them. In this case, the curator would be responsible for locating and identifying items which must be preserved and may not be destroyed without approval of the Museum.

Less sensitive material could be assembled in a holding area where the passage of 5, 10, or 50 years could be expected to result in their gradual declassification. During World War II members of OSS would have shuddered at the suggestion that their equipment could ever be openly displayed to the public. While this is not yet true in all cases, many items such as the crossbow and one-shot pistol certainly are no longer SECRET. Sabotage techniques used by OSS have appeared many times in the press, TV, and movies and the original security classifications certainly no longer need apply. This question unfortunately is academic since it is highly unlikely that any of this gear has survived and could be added to the Museum.

With a few exceptions such as the U-2 reconnaissance plane of the TSD semisubmersible skiff, most of the material would not pose a warehousing problem. It will be necessary, however, to store the material selected for the Museum so as to avoid deterioration. In all cases it will be mandatory to catalog and document the items and establish their provenance.

It would be impossible for the establishment of the Museum and organization of periodic exhibitions to be handled by an individual on a part-time basis. A full-time curator with access to clerical assistance, Printing Services, maintenance personnel, etc., is required. An experienced museum curator or conservator would find no difficulty in setting up the Agency collection. Since it is unlikely that such a person is already employed by CIA, it may be necessary to identify a candidate for the position and detail him or her to the Smithsonian Institution for several months of familiarization and training. Alternately, the Smithsonian would no doubt be willing to furnish a consultant who would, of course, require clearance.

The curator of the Museum would work closely with the Curator, Historical Intelligence Collection (HIC), to avoid overlooking certain materials. It should be decided whether passports, travel documents, and propaganda material manufactured by TSD should come under the jurisdiction of the Museum or the HIC. Some items of importance including perhaps early directives or instructions received from the White House most certainly should be preserved, as should photographs or portraits of senior executive personnel.

Candidate material would include captured Soviet equipment such as audio surveillance devices, photographic gear, or assassination weapons. Material issued to a CIA agent and returned after a successful operation is obviously of great interest, as would be his actual photographs, microdots, or deaddrop concealments. The list of desiderata is long, but before it can be drawn up the Museum must be established to prevent further loss of desirable items.